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Capitol security brace to thwart possible leaks

By Bill Gertz
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At the request of the Senate Intelligence Committee's staff director, the CIA quietly conducted an exhaustive security check on Capitol Hill last year to see if circumstances existed for classified information to leak.

During the secret security check, a public debate surfaced between Committee Chairman David Durenberger, Minnesota Republican, and CIA Director William J. Casey over what Mr. Casey called "repeated compromise of sensitive intelligence sources and methods" from the panel.

Staff director Bernard F. McMahon said yesterday that the inquiry showed the panel operating in a secure fashion, although the CIA analyst recommended several "mostly procedural" changes.

As a result of the three-month survey by the CIA, personnel security measures were beefed up, periodic "security awareness" briefings will be scheduled and the panel was asked to consider drawing up a security manual that could be used by any senator or congressional aide with access to classified information.

The inquiry was ordered by Mr. McMahon after a staff shake-up last summer, and coincided with a time when senior Reagan administration officials were criticizing the panel as being a sieve.

"We understand that we have to be purer than Caesar's wife because we have an awful lot of sensitive information among a very few

people on the staff," said Mr. McMahon, who once served as an aide to Carter administration CIA Director Stansfield Turner. "We asked for an outside consultant — probably one of the most hard-nosed individuals we could possibly find in the intelligence community — to come in and give us an independent survey of our security procedures from top to bottom."

Mr. McMahon said William Kotopish, then director of the CIA's office of security and now a CIA national intelligence officer for narcotics, conducted the survey. Mr. Kotopish declined to be interviewed.

"It's not appropriate for us to discuss other people's security," Mr. Kotopish said yesterday through a spokesman.

In the survey, Mr. McMahon said, Mr. Kotopish conducted interviews with all committee staff personnel, reviewed the offices of the 15 senators who sit on the committee, studied accounting procedures and examined rules for handling the press.

The committee's 46 staff members, including 13 "designees" assigned to senators on the committee, are appointed after approval by a majority of intelligence committee members.

Mr. McMahon, however, would not say if the analyst concluded that panel aides should be subject to periodic polygraph, or lie-detector, tests.

"That's an issue that is under debate by the members," Mr. McMahon said. "A lot of members have expressed the same kinds of concerns and issues that need to be clarified."

Mr. McMahon said the CIA "gave us a very positive report."